



30 Arbor St. Suite 210
Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 523-1699

<http://connecticutworkingfamilies.org/>

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To the Co-Chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee

Testimony in OPPOSITION to SB4, SB189, SB191, SB573, HB5002, HB5059, HB5148, HB5149, HB5151, HB5649, HB5647, HB5651, HB5654, HB5658, HB5805, HB5806, HB5810

Submitted by Lindsay Farrell, Organizing Director

We would like to submit testimony against any legislation that is an attack on public employees or the people who government serves, which includes several of the bills being heard today.

Every year, Connecticut ranks among the top three states with the greatest economic disparity. That's a fancy way of saying our rich families are very rich, and our poor families are very poor. Our middle class, as it has been across the country, is shrinking smaller and smaller. This is due in part to the Great Recession, from which we are all still trying to recover, but also because during the Regan and Bush administrations we saw tax rates on the highest-earning households dwindle smaller and smaller and benefits and opportunities for working class families fewer and fewer.

We've heard it before, but it bears repeating: public employees did not cause this crisis, nor did the working and poor families who rely on government services, now more than they have in a long time. This is the exact wrong time to cut services to the less fortunate residents of this state, and the exact wrong time to layoff or cut the pay of middle class public employees. It is not only inhumane; it is foolish economic policy. The loss of wages, the loss of benefits, the absence of education funding, the cycle of inadequate health coverage, these policies all harm the recovery of our economy.

Folks like to talk these days about trimming budgets and cutting all the waste in government, but rarely do folks have any real ideas about what to cut. Do we kick poor children off of Husky, the only access they have to health care services? Do we leave abused children in unstable households? Or do we halve education aid or cut their shot at funding for college? These services are just examples of the reality that our state government addresses.

And how do we pay for these essentials? Tax those who can most afford it. The wealthiest households have simply not been contributing their fair share for the past several years, and we need to catch them up. A marginal tax rate increase of 10% for middle-class families, while millionaires see a marginal rate increase of 3% simply is not "shared sacrifice." Very wealthy families need to contribute more towards balancing our budget and protecting the parts of government families rely on.

And stop villainizing public employees. They protect us, maintain our infrastructure, look out for our children and our elderly, and contribute substantially to the high quality of life we have here in Connecticut. They are our neighbors, they are taxpayers and middle class families.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.